DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 870 CS 011 469

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TITLE Developing Vocabulary Skills in a Learning Disability Class through Cooperative Learning Groups. Application Project--Module 6. Collaborative and Cooperative Techniques.
PUB DATE 3 Jun 93
NOTE 17p.; Attachments contain handwritten material.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Learning; *Instructional Effectiveness; Junior High Schools; Junior High School Students; *Learning Disabilities; Learning Strategies; Program Descriptions; Student Attitudes; *Vocabulary Development; *Vocabulary Skills

ABSTRACT

A program was designed to help learning disabled junior high school students develop vocabulary skills through cooperative learning groups. Twelve students in the sixth or seventh grade spent 50% of the day in a learning disability resource program. The students were formed into mixed ability groups. Two commercially available programs designed for learning-disabled students were used. A modified scoring system and reward system were used to help motivate students individually and to motivate student groups to improve. The reward system was adjusted two weeks into the project. The program consisted of five-day cycles: student groups spent the first two days working on lesson materials; practice quizzes were taken individually and checked together (no answer sheets were provided) the third day; student spent the fourth day playing a variety of vocabulary-enriching games; and individual accountability of the cooperative learning groups was addressed on the fifth day. Initial reluctance to share their work disappeared as the students began to contribute to the group and share in the work. Scores fluctuated from week to week, depending on the difficulty of the words. As weeks progressed, there were fewer scores below 80%, indicating progress as a group. Cooperation among students deepened and students changed their attitudes about working with each other. Cooperative learning appears to be an effective technique for integrating the special student into the regular curriculum. (An example of a semantic mapping activity and a chart of data are included.) (RS)

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ED 363 870

APPLICATION PROJECT

MODULE 6

COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE TECHNIQUES

TOPIC

DEVELOPING VOCABULARY SKILLS IN A LEARNING DISABILITY CLASS THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUPS

by

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332-48-9669

June 3, 1993

CS011469

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APPLICATION PROJECT-MODULE 6

Inquiry- Can my learning disabled junior high students develop vocabulary skills through cooperative learning groups?

Rationale for Inquiry- Learning disabled students generally score two or more years below grade level on achievement and intelligence test evaluations of vocabulary knowledge. This weakness in vocabulary knowledge directly affects how well a student is able to understand text. Because this is a deficit area common to all my students, I elected to form cooperative learning groups to target vocabulary development. I based the organization of this project on information from Module 1 citing effective vocabulary instruction and the information from Module 6 on cooperative learning.

Subjects- This project was applied with a group of twelve students ages eleven to fourteen. The nine boys and three girls were in the sixth and seventh grade. They were all learning disabled students placed in my resource program, meaning they were able to function in the regular classroom fifty percent of the day. These students were assigned to me for one class period a day for vocabulary and spelling instruction. Many of these same students came to me for reading instruction daily also. We worked on vocabulary development through our reading materials during that class period as well.

Forming mixed ability groups from this group of students was challenging. However, I was able to identify each student as high, average, or low relevant to each other. I was careful to provide close supervision of the cooperative learning to ensure faulty learning was not taking place.

Material Selection- After studying the research indicating a strictly definitional or contextual approach to vocabulary instruction as being ineffective, I decided to incorporate several approaches to provide effective instruction. The research of Carr and Wixson, 1986, identified three properties of vocabulary instruction effective in increasing reading comprehension. Integration relates the new instructional word to words known and understood by the student. Relationships between words and prior knowledge are crucial in helping the child see where the target word fits in his vocabulary knowledge, as opposed to presenting each new word as an independent word. Several activities used in the vocabulary practice exercises recognized this important aspect of vocabulary development. Repetition and meaningful use were the other two important features of effective vocabulary instruction. This was considered in the group instruction when the words were first introduced, as well as the cooperative group activities that followed.

I elected to use the World of Vocabulary published by Globe Book Company and Teaching Vocabulary Worksheets, Jr.-Sr. High Edition published by LinguiSystems. Both programs were designed for learning

disabled students, and were appropriate for the functioning level of my students. I started with the Orange Level of the Globe series which is written on a fourth to fifth grade level. I felt my students could find success with this material. This softcover supplementary vocabulary series had several features I felt were important for my group of students. Words were presented in groups of ten and introduced in a brief, high-interest story about a high-profile person or topic. Exercises followed that provided repeated practice with the selected words. Other activities were used to supplement those offered in each unit. A list of those are included in this paper. The vocabulary program by LinguiSystems was arranged in a theme-based format, and began at the sixth grade level. Ten words were presented in each unit with sentences to model the appropriate use of each word. A synonym-antonym chart was included with each unit of study, and was used as a springboard for semantic mapping activities. Reinforcement work followed with emphasis on the new word's relationship with other words known to the student. Proper usage was tested through sentences including the target words, some used correctly and some used inappropriately. The group had to determine if the word was correctly used, and if not, had to replace the incorrect word with the correct choice. This focused attention on usage as opposed to strictly definitional emphasis. The only drawback to this series was that it did not directly involve a story format for introduction of new words. This feature was motivational in the Globe series, and thus, the favorite among the students.

Procedure- I modeled my cooperative groups on the technique developed by Robert E. Slavin at Johns Hopkins University. Specifically, I modified the Student Teams Achievement Division to meet my students' needs. I formed three groups of four students with as much mixed ability as was possible.

Team I	Team II	Team III
Greg	Donald	Jennifer
Matt	Brandi	Luke
Christina	James	Justin
Brian	Mike	Gerald

Prior to beginning work in the respective groups, I explained the point system and the rewards to be offered. I modified the scoring procedure to meet the needs of my special students. I was reluctant to award points based solely on improvement from one week to the next. Achieving a perfect score one week would mean that student would have to maintain a perfect score for the following weeks. I wanted to continue to award points for achievement that was less than perfect, realizing the motivation problems of my group of students.

Given the increasing difficulty of the vocabulary words, I felt the students should continue to earn points for any work 80% or better. Bonus points would be awarded for improvement scores also. Each of my students had an Individual Education Plan objective related to vocabulary acquisition with a goal of 80% accuracy. Students earned points based on the individual quiz scores on the material they had been studying. Each child strived to exceed his own past score. This allowed each child to earn points to contribute to the team score. Team charts were posted on the wall with each student recording his earned points for his team each week.

The following point system was used.

Quiz Score	Improvement Score Points
80-85- 1 point	5 Bonus points if score exceeds previous week's score
86-90- 2 points	
91-95- 3 points	
96-99- 4 points	
100- 5 points	

Team Scores were as follows:

4-10 points Certificate for 2 grade points extra

11-20 points Certificate for 3 grade points extra

25-35 points Certificate for 4 grade points extra

35 plus points Certificate for 5 grade points extra

The higher each team member scored, the more points each individual member would earn to be added to his grade. This proved to be a highly motivational approach when the students saw their grades improve from these extra points. The opportunity for success for all groups was always within reach, and most weeks all three groups earned a reward.

NOTE: After the first two weeks of this project, I realized several students were not achieving the minimum acceptable score of 80%. However, most were contributing toward the team points with improvement points awarded. At this point, I adjusted the reward system by adding an additional incentive with ten minutes of free time for any team whose members all scored 80% or better. As indicated by the included chart of scores, that additional reward served to encourage these teams to work harder with the lower functioning students to improve scores.

After establishing the point system, and posting the classroom chart, we began work in the vocabulary materials.

Day 1- I started with the series by Globe. Each student had his own copy of the worktext. They located the picture page which preceeds every lesson. They would fold their books so they could not read the title of the lesson. This page served as an excellent discussion starter. Prior knowledge was activated, and the discussion served as a motivator for the lesson. Before we actually began each lesson, I felt the interest had been stimulated, and each child had had the opportunity to contribute his thoughts on what he anticipated the lesson topic to be. We then read the brief story together and completed the two comprehension questions that followed. We were then ready to focus on the ten words presented for study. I extensively used semantic mapping as a method to activate the students' prior knowledge of vocabulary. These diagrams helped the students visualize how words relate to one another, as opposed to learning words in isolation using a strictly definitional approach. Most of this work was done by me on the chalkboard. A stimulus word would be written, and the students would think of related words, synonyms, antonyms, words related by structural analysis, etc. We would study the sample sentence with the word from the lesson materials, and develop our definition to be checked by a dictionary. After I had modeled this procedure several times, each group was given a slate and stimulus words to map as a group. Time permitting, these were later shared with the rest of the class. A sample mapping activity is included.

Day 2- Each cooperative group worked through the lesson material together. They were encouraged to answer questions for each other, and help each other learn the new words. I circulated to monitor the group activities, and to direct when necessary.

Day 3- Practice quizzes were taken individually. They were then checked together. No answer sheet was provided. I wanted them to discuss any differences of opinions and resolve problems together. Students helped each other with any remaining problem areas.

Day 4- This was by far the most popular day. I adapted the format of the Teams Games Tournaments developed by Slavin to include it in the STAD format. The games served as practice and reinforcement for the target vocabulary words. Points were not awarded for these activities. Games were played within cooperative groups as preparation for the quiz. Some of the games and activities used on Day 4 were as follows.

BINGO- Vocabulary words from the current unit of study as well as any words previously studied were randomly written on cards. Either synonyms, definitions, or sentences excluding the target word were used as clues. I kept a file box of each word studied on index cards. Clues were written on the back of each card for that

particular word.

VOCABULARY DEFINITION BEE- Points were scored for each word identified after the definition was read from a card.

TIC-TAC-TOE- This was played in pairs. A deck of cards with sentences omitting the target word was placed on the table. Indentifying the appropriate word allowed you to place your X on the grid.

VOCABULARY PASSWORD- Clues were given to get your partner to say the word.

VOCABULARY CONCENTRATION- Sentences omitting the target word were written on one card. The vocabulary words were written on individual cards. This matching concentration game required the student to turn over one word card and one sentence card . In order to keep the pair, the two cards had to correspond. This game involved not only knowledge of the proper usage of the vocabulary, but also required short term memory skills.

HANGMAN- Blanks were drawn to correspond with the number of letters in the word. This was played as the traditional spelling version of Hangman is played. Although spelling of the vocabulary words was not

tested, I wanted the students to recognize these words readily in the text they would read, and have as accurate of an idea of the proper spelling as possible.

VOCABULARY USAGE- Word cards were placed face down. First player drew a card. If he could pronounce the word and give its meaning or use it in a sentence, he kept the card. Point value varied according to the difficulty of the word. This was a good review word game, and provided repetion of the words studied in previous units.

Day 5- This day addressed the individual accountability of the cooperative learning groups. Each student took a quiz to check for learning of the new vocabulary words. I felt the students needed practice using the words rather than simply stating the meaning of the words. Consequently, quizzes consisted of sentence completion as well as self-generated sentences. Sometimes the students were asked to use several of the words in a brief paragraph or story. Connecting these words in a coherent paragraph required some creativity. As the year progressed, they became better at this task.

Conclusion- Initially, cooperation was not widespread in the three cooperative groups. Many students were reluctant to share their work and help teammates complete assignments. However, it didn't take long for them to begin to contribute to the group and share in the work. Peer pressure kept reluctant and unmotivated students involved in the group's work. I viewed this as a positive side-effect of the cooperative learning situation. They learned to work with one another. Several of my learning disabled students are also behavior disordered, and do not typically work well with others. They are generally critical and judgmental of others. Negative verbal remarks are common. For the duration of the cooperative learning groups, I saw this behavior almost totally eliminated. They helped each other work toward a common goal. Self-esteem appeared to improve significantly, and many students commented that this was their favorite class.

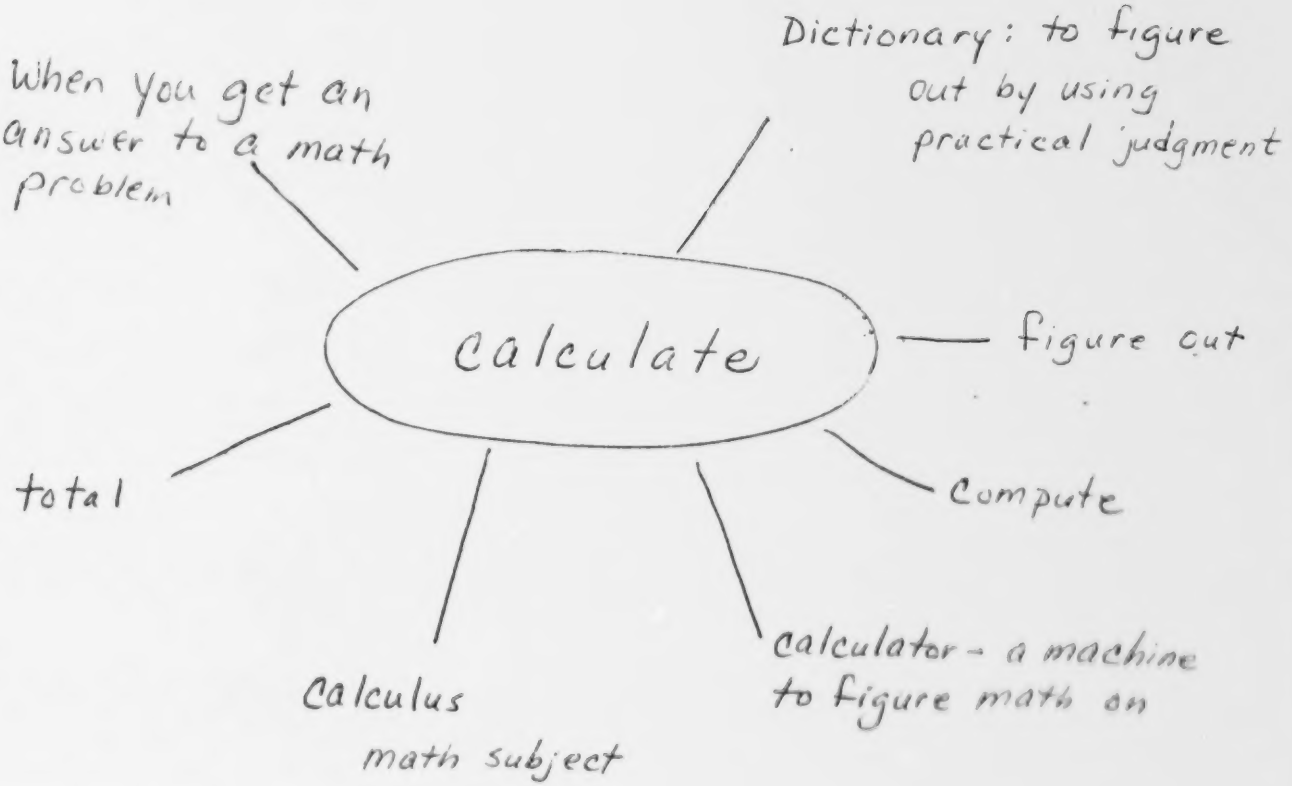
Scores fluctuated from week to week, depending on the difficulty of the words. I was unable to detect a pattern of consistent improvement based on the weekly quizzes. However, as the weeks progressed, there were fewer scores below 80%, so, as a group, progress was made. The vocabulary component of the grade for the spelling-vocabulary class period improved from the previous quarter's averages by seven to thirteen percentage points. I am confident the target words were integrated into the students' vocabulary knowledge. Many of these words would appear in other written work such as journals and power writing paragraphs in English. When we would encounter a word in a novel in Reading, or in a spelling unit, they were quick to recognize it. I view this as a positive indicator that

the words studied were becoming part of the child's recognizable and usable vocabulary.

It is impossible to provide direct instruction for every word a child will encounter in reading text. Care must be taken not to devote so much time to vocabulary instruction at the expense of reading. Research has shown that increasing the volume of reading is the most effective way to promote vocabulary growth. The materials I used selected words based on analysis of eight major basal reading series, so I felt the twenty-five minutes of class time spent daily on these words was warranted. I felt the students learned strategies for incorporating new vocabulary into their existing vocabulary knowledge. In considering the learning problems of these students, I feel this approach would be very effective with specialized vocabulary, such as words found in a science curriculum.

Observing the cooperation and change in attitude of my students in working with each other, I view cooperative learning as an effective technique for integrating the special student into the regular curriculum. With implementation of inclusion, the practice of including or mainstreaming the special student in the regular curriculum with modifications made to accomodate that student's special needs, cooperative learning techniques would benefit the child socially as well as academically. Mixed ability grouping could be better achieved with a larger and varied group of students available. This would be an excellent way to integrate these special students and help them be accepted by their peers.

Example of Semantic Mapping Activity



We did this on the board together.

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This information was taken from the wall chart.

	Week 1			Week 2			Week 3			Week 4			Week 5			Week 6			Week 7			Week 8			Week 9		
	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus	Quiz	Pts	Bonus
Team 1																											
Greg	80	1		77	0	0	90	2	5	85	1	0	82	1	0	85	1	5	79	0	0	100	5	5	92	3	0
Matt	85	1		72	0	0	80	1	5	80	1	0	84	1	5	92	3	5	95	3	5	80	1	0	85	1	5
Christina	92	3		85	1	0	90	2	5	100	5	5	90	2	0	85	1	0	90	2	5	90	2	0	100	5	5
Brian	77	0		75	0	0	80	1	5	82	1	5	80	1	0	85	1	5	88	2	5	80	1	0	84	1	5
		5			1			26			18			5			21			22			14			25	
Team 2																											
Donald	89	2		100	5	5	85	1	0	90	2	5	90	2	0	100	5	5	100	5	0	90	2	0	90	2	0
Brandi	75	0		70	0	0	80	1	5	75	0	0	82	1	5	80	1	0	82	1	5	90	2	5	80	1	0
James	70	0		75	0	5	80	1	5	80	1	0	85	1	5	80	1	0	100	5	5	100	5	0	90	2	0
Mike	60	0		65	0	5	68	0	5	10	0	5	82	1	5	88	2	5	78	0	0	80	1	5	82	1	5
		2			20			18			13			20			19			21			20			11	
Team 3																											
Jennifer	75	0		70	0	0	72	0	5	80	1	5	82	1	0	80	1	0	84	1	5	80	1	0	80	1	0
Luke	80	1		80	1	0	82	1	5	82	1	0	82	1	0	80	1	0	88	2	5	84	1	0	90	2	5
Justin	90	2		95	4	5	100	5	5	80	1	0	85	1	5	90	2	5	90	2	0	100	5	5	100	5	0
Gerald	75	0		80	1	5	82	1	5	82	1	0	78	0	0	90	2	5	80	1	0	80	1	0	78	0	0
		3			16			17			9			8			16			16			13			13	

Quiz - Quiz Grade Pts - Points for quiz percentage Bonus - Bonus points for improvement score